

Students' viewpoints on professor's performance, method of selection, description of duties and the extent of responsibilities

Saeed Hajiaghajani, MSc¹; Raheb Ghorbani, PhD²; Mohammad Sadegh Jenabi, MSc³;
Masoomeh Saberian, MSc⁴

¹ Faculty Member of Medical Education & Nursing, Head of Educational Development center, Semnan University of Medical Sciences

² Faculty Member of Statistics, Research Director, Semnan University of Medical Sciences

³ Faculty Member of Speech therapy, Semnan University of Medical Sciences

⁴ Faculty Member of Nursing, Educational Development Center, Semnan University of Medical Sciences

ABSTRACT

Background Universities have a crucial responsibility in training the students and to achieve this goal, provision of consultation and guidance is indispensable. In this way, students will be assisted to overcome difficulties improve self-awareness and independent decision-making.

Methods In this cross-sectional study 275 students (205 female, 70 male), studying for an MD or a BS, or a college degree participated, for whom guiding professors were assigned from different departments. The students completed a 45-item questionnaire including queries on demographic, performance of guiding professors, how they are selected by the students, and description of their responsibilities and the expectations of the students from them. To ensure the validity and reliability of the questionnaires, content validity test and re-test method were used and the students were then asked to pass their comments using "x" marks in front of each question. Results were analysed using SPSS software and Chi-square at the level of 5%.

Results Our study showed that 64% of the students had referred to guiding professors individually of whom 59.1% were seeking educational consultation; 86.9% were "eager" or "relatively eager" to refer to guiding professors individually. Of all participant, 57.5% expected their guiding professors in the same educational field, and 53.5% of them preferred guiding professors to be selected for freshmen by the students of the final year of the same educational field. Help of guiding professor in educational, familial and social economic problems was preferred by 63.3% of students.

Conclusion Our study indicated that guiding professors have been able to solve students' problems to a great extent.

Key Words GUIDING PROFESSORS, STUDENT, CONSULTATION, GUIDANCE

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Introduction

Consultation and particularly educational consultation, is a dynamic and purposeful relationship based on interactions between professors and students, which is carried out through methods which correspond to the students' need. In such a

relationship, attention to self-awareness and independent decision-making of the students are underlined (1).

Universities are responsible for training the students and to attain this goal, providing the students with consultation and guidance service is a necessity (2). This is due to the fact that students are moved from different rural and urban familial environments to the open and to some extent non-supervised environments of the universities. Presence of boys and girls in the same educational environments, homesickness, living in student

Correspondence Saeed Hajiaghajani, Educational Development Center, Semnan University of Medical Sciences, Semnan, Iran.

Tel (+98)-231-444-1730, Fax (+98)-231-444-0225, sa_haji@yahoo.com

dormitories or unfamiliar residents, youthful and ambitious mentalities of the students and other potential dangers and pitfalls can lead to certain problems. All of the afore-mentioned factors put emphasis on taking advantage of guidance and some kind of partial leadership of committed and knowledgeable consultants and guiding professors, so that students' educational deterioration, drop-outs, unnecessary transfers and changes in educational fields, failure to attain scientific and professional goals of education, prolongation of educational process and finally waste of scientific and material facilities could be prevented.(4)

Previously performed surveys on psychological, emotional and social problems of university students as well as several other studies underline the significance and necessity of organized and strict actions for selecting guiding professors, in order to overcome preventable problems and educational deteriorations related to such problems.(4)

Guiding the students has been considered as one of the responsibilities faculty members at all universities, according to the article no. 44 of employment by-laws for faculty members in medical schools (chapter 7, general responsibilities of faculty members) (5).

A guiding professor is a full-time working faculty member who is responsible for educational direction, guidance and consultation of students in case of individual, emotional, social, familial and other unexpected problems within the possible limits, so that one can be effective in educational promotion and psychological, physical, spiritual and social health of students (4).

Consultation centers should try to create pleasant and friendly environments so that students feel comfortable and make sure that any information given by them will remain confidential (7). It goes without saying that failure to provide the students with adequate and appropriate consultation would be blemished the achievement of educational goals by the students.

For this reason, Semnan University of Medical Sciences has appointed guiding professors for newly admitted students since 1999. According to duties which have been assigned to them, they are supposed to guide and counsel the students 4 hours a week. The students can refer to them individually 2 hours a week and another 2 hours are allocated to group consultation and guidance by professors in classrooms.

The purpose of the present survey is to assess the performance of guiding professors during the

last 2-year period and to determine their duties and responsibilities from students' standpoints.

Materials and Methods

The present survey is a cross-sectional study, carried out to assess the 3-year performance of guiding professors as well as the method of selection of these professors by the students and the description of their duties and the extent of their responsibilities according to the students studying in Semnan University of Medical Sciences. The students were studying in faculties of the above-mentioned university, in Semnan and Dameghan in programs leading to MD, BS and college degree. Statistical society comprised all of the students for whom guiding professors were appointed by the respective faculty during the last three years. The studied population included 275, consisting of 205 female and 70 male students. They were present at the university campus while the study was being performed and filled out and returned the questionnaires. The means of study was a 45-item questionnaire including 5 demographic queries, 15 queries related to guiding professors' performance, 12 queries regarding the method by which the professors are selected by the students, 13 queries concerning the description of duties and the extent of responsibilities of the professors and students' expectations. To determine the scientific reliability and consistency of the questionnaires re-test and content validity methods were used. Those responsible for distributing the questionnaires, were then asked to refer to the respective faculties to distribute the questionnaires among the students asking the students to answer the multiple-choice questions using "x" mark. The questionnaires were then gathered and the data was introduced to the computer. Chi-square test at the meaningful level of 5% was used to analyse the data.

Results

The results concerning demographic characteristics of the students (Table 1) demonstrated that the majority of the studied population were female (74.5%), single (91.6%), admitted in the University in 2000 (54.5%), studying for a BS degree (46.9%) and have had guiding professors for at least 2 semesters (41.1%).

Other results regarding the performance of guiding professors during the 3-year period of the study showed that the majority of the students

(64%) had referred to their guiding professors individually. Female students (64.9%) referred to guiding professors more than male students (61.4%). In addition, students of medicine (73.8%) referred to their guiding professors more than those studying for a BS or a college degree. Students have mostly referred to professors for consultation and obtaining information about educational by-laws and regulations. Of all students who had referred to guiding professors, 86.9% were eager or relatively eager to speak to their professors individually. The number of references were higher in female students and students of medicine whereas male students (54.3%) were more eager than female students (30.7%) and those studying for a BS degree (38.8%) were more willing to refer to guiding professors, compared to the students of medicine. The performed test has demonstrated a significant relationship between gender and students' eagerness to refer to guiding professors individually ($P=0.002$) (Table 2).

On the other hand, 72.3% of the students deemed their professors eager or relatively eager to receive them individually. The result of consultations were considered to be effective or relatively effective by 75.01% of the students. A greater fraction of students of medicine, compared to BS and college students, considered this result effective or relatively effective. A significant relation was observed between the educational level of the students and the effectiveness of educational consultation and guidance ($P=0.002$) (Table 3).

Results demonstrated that most of the students (45.2%) deemed the presence of guiding professors in classrooms for group consultation and guidance of the students, relatively effective. Female students (36.3%) have found such consultations ineffective more than male students (30.6%). Also, students studying for a BS (46.2%) considered group consultations ineffective more than those studying for a college degree (26.9%) and students of medicine (20.0%).

A significant relation was observed between gender ($P=0.037$) and the program education ($P=0.000$) with the effectiveness of group consultation and guidance (Table 4). The majority of the studied population (53.5%) believe that guiding professors should be chosen according to the opinion of the students of the final year of the same educational field. The identical educational field and a medium work experience along with

the age of 26-35 years were considered favourable for selecting guiding professors by 57.5% and 45.1% of the students, respectively. Of all participants, 51.3% believe that guiding professors must be chosen for the whole duration of an educational level. Half of the students attached little importance to the gender similarity of the guiding professors and them. Female students (54.1%) and the students studying at the for a BS degree (58.1%) considered the gender of the professors unimportant, more than male students (41.4 %) and students studying for a college degree (50.0%) and the students of medicine (31.0%), respectively. A significant relation was found between students' gender ($P=0.020$) and the program ($P=0.028$) and professors' gender (Table 5).

Other results regarding the determination of guiding professors' duties and students' expectations from them indicated that the majority of the studied population (63.3%) expected guiding professors to help them, as part of their duties, with all of their educational, familial, socio-economic problems which could lead to educational

TABLE 1 FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF THE STUDIED POPULATION WITH REGARD TO DEMOGRAPHIC PARAMETERS

Demographic Parameters		Number	%
Gender	Female	205	74.5
	Male	70	25.5
Marital Status	Single	252	91.6
	Married	23	8.4
Program	MD	42	15.3
	BS	129	46.9
	College	104	37.8
Year of Entrance	1999	125	45.5
	2000	150	54.5
Number of semesters that student has been consulting the guiding professor	1	44	16
	2	115	41.9
	3	65	23.6
	4	51	18.5
Total		275	100

TABLE 2 STUDENTS' EAGERNESS FOR INDIVIDUAL REFERENCE TO GUIDING PROFESSORS WITH REGARD TO GENDER AND PROGRAM 2001-2002

Parameter		Students' eagerness for individual reference to guiding professors							
		Yes		To Some Extent		No		Total	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Gender	Female	63	30.7	113	55.1	29	14.1	205	100
	Male	38	54.3	25	35.7	7	10	70	100
Program	MD	12	28.6	23	54.8	7	16.7	42	100
	BS	50	38.8	57	44.2	22	17.1	129	100
	College	39	37.5	58	55.8	7	6.7	104	100
Total		101	36.7	138	50.2	36	13.1	275	100

TABLE 3 EFFECTIVENESS OF EDUCATIONAL CONSULTATION AND GUIDANCE WITH REGARD TO GENDER AND PROGRAM 2001-2002

Parameter		Effectiveness of educational consultation and guidance							
		Completely		To Some Extent		Not at all		Total	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Gender	Female	28	21.1	72	54.1	33	24.8	133	100
	Male	6	13.6	27	61.4	11	25.0	44	100
Program	MD	2	6.5	27	87.1	2	6.5	31	100
	BS	16	19.8	38	46.9	27	33.3	81	100
	College	16	24.6	34	52.3	15	23.1	65	100
Total		34	19.2	138	50.2	36	13.1	275	100

deterioration. Seventy nine percent of the students expected guiding professors to solicit the required information from the students, under their consent, and 42.3% of the students considered confidentiality part of guiding professors' duties in this respect. Moreover, 65% of the studied population wanted guiding

professors to interfere directly, provided they were asked to. Female students (66.2%) and the students of medicine (69%) demanded a direct interference from guiding professors more than male students and those studying at other programs, respectively.

TABLE 4 EFFECTIVENESS OF EDUCATIONAL CONSULTATION AND GUIDANCE WITH REGARD TO GENDER AND PROGRAM 2001-2002

Parameter		Effectiveness of educational consultation and guidance							
		Yes		To Some Extent		No		Total	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Gender	Female	27	16.1	80	47.6	61	36.3	168	100
	Male	16	32.7	18	36.7	15	30.6	49	100
Program	MD	4	11.4	24	68.6	7	20	35	100
	BS	15	14.4	41	39.4	48	46.2	104	100
	College	24	30.8	33	42.3	21	26.9	78	100
Total		43	19.8	98	45.2	76	35.0	275	100

TABLE 5 GENDER OF GUIDING PROFESSORS WITH REGARD TO GENDER AND PROGRAM 2001-2002

Parameter		Gender of guiding professors with respect to students' gender									
		Professors and students must be of the same gender		In particular situations can be of different genders		Not important at all		Other		Total	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Gender	Female	62	30.2	28	13.7	111	54.1	4	2	205	100
	Male	35	50.0	6	8.6	29	41.4	-	-	70	100
Program	MD	20	47.6	9	21.4	13	31	-	-	42	100
	BS	43	33.3	9	7.0	75	58.1	2	1.6	129	100
	College	34	32.7	16	15.4	52	50.0	2	1.9	104	100
Total		97	35.3	34	12.4	140	50.9	4	1.5	275	100

Discussion

This survey showed that guiding professors have been able to provide an appropriate assistance to solve students' problems by offering them consultation and guidance services. As a result, most of the students were eager to refer to them (Table 2) and have stated that individual consultation and guidance by the professors has been effective or relatively effective (Table 3) and this is indicative of the fact that guiding professors had an acceptable performance in this respect during the first two years of their appointment.

Since male students are in minority in most of the educational fields offered by the University, they are not much interested in putting forward their problems in the presence of female students or in group and thereby, they would prefer individual consultations.

Guiding professors' duties concerning group consultation and guidance comprised a 2-hour class course per week in order to familiarize the students with educational rules and regulations. It seems that a complete success in preventing educational deterioration of the students and transmitting the required information to them has not been achieved in group consultations. In fact, these professors should have received necessary instructions before undertaking to act as educational consultants. In addition, university authorities should attach more importance and maintain positive attitude to this project. This will, in turn, cause students and professors to consider educational consultation an important task and seek experts' standards and guidelines in this respect (8).

It is, therefore, the responsibility of university authorities to increase the level of awareness and skill of guiding professors by organizing educational workshops for them and providing them with educational by-law as well as a clear description of their duties and thus, reducing the number of individual student references and increasing their knowledge of educational rules and regulations through group consultations. This can effectively provide students with continuous group consultation service and increase their knowledge of educational regulations and reduce the number of unnecessary individual references.

Based on a survey, Hazavei reported that guiding professors' performance in faculties of Hamedan University of Medical Sciences was not acceptable and most of guiding professors were not familiar with their duties (2). Moreover, students are not satisfied with professors'

consultation and guidance service (6). The results of Hazavei's survey, opposed those of the present study, concerning the relative success of guiding professors' performance in Semnan University of Medical Sciences in individual consultations. Existence of a guiding professors center at the University and the related faculties may explain this difference since this center is responsible for conducting and instructing guiding professors and supervising their performance, by holding regular monthly meetings.

Furthermore, since most of the students believe that guiding professors should be selected by students of the final year, it is recommended that opinions and standpoints of senior students in each educational field be sought and used more often to select guiding professors for freshmen, in order to increase the enthusiasm of students for referring to guiding professors.

It is also recommended that female and male professors be appointed in each educational field so that students can decide on whether their professors be male or female. This can allow them to refer to any professor they like based on their chosen topic.

Moreover, based on the findings concerning determination of guiding professors' range of duties and the expectations from them, we recommend that as part of their duties, guiding professors help the students with their educational, familial, socio-economic problems. This could somehow cause educational deterioration. They should obtain the required information from students and under their consent and as part of their duties, treat this information as confidential.

We also recommend that guiding professors interfere directly, only when they are asked to. Students also expect guiding professors to receive them whenever the students need to. Guiding professors should not limit their services only to pre-determined hours and should try to accept the students on the same day that the students asked for help.

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